

Pillars and Time by Leslie Ford

This is a story about cycles of life. We all have something to contribute through our life and our death to the next generation or those around us.

Sitting atop a pillar, at the edge of the yard, Mystic Minnie sunned himself and looked out upon the world. He was unquestionably considered the wisest cat of the neighborhood. Soon, the young kittens would gather around the yard to listen to the old cat tell tales. As pillar-keeper, Minnie would willingly do so partly because he liked a good story, and partly because he thought it was his responsibility.

The neighborhood kittens had been talking amongst themselves about why Minnie was always sitting up on that pillar, so one day they elected a particularly bold tailless youth to challenge the sun-soaking old cat with questions.

"Why do you sit up there all day?" asked young B2.

"This is the best place to warm myself in the sun, and I can watch what goes on around the world," answered Minnie.

"What's so important to be watching all the time?"

"Well, for one thing, I can look out after you as you learn how to be a cat and maybe, if I choose to, warn you of the dangers lurking and unknown."

"Ah, I'm not scared of anything. I'm fierce, and I'm quick."

"Be that as it may, but there are many things you know nothing of. Do you ever wonder why you run so fast to climb as high as you can up that tree?"

"I'm playing, it's fun."

"Actually, climbing is an important skill, necessary for escaping an enemy or catching prey."

"Okay, whatever you say, see ya," and B2 bounded off with his friends, barely hearing Minnie as he quietly added, "Someday you'll remember this."

B2 had an itch, he wasn't quite sure what or where it was, but something was nagging him as he wrestled and ran the day away. Long into the night, after the two-legged put dinner out, B2 kept thinking about his conversation with the old cat. The next morning, before his friends could rope him into the day's play, B2 went to see the wise one.

"What did you mean when you said catch prey?" he sheepishly asked.

"Good day little one, sleep well?" Minnie was feeling a bit cattish.

"Come on, what does that mean?"

"Your nature is to hunt birds, mice, and bugs to feed yourself."

"But I have plenty to eat, the two-legged that lives in the house puts food and water out here every day. I'm never hungry."

"Life was different for us before the two-leggeds," and then Minnie told the tale:

A long time ago, in a far away place, our ancestors were great hunters in a vast land. They were very big, fast, and cunning with many cousins of diverse colors, shapes, and customs. No other creature of the land challenged the ancestors'

mighty prowess. Then one day the humans came along. For a while, they lived side by side in awe and fear of each other. The humans had respect for our ancestors' command of their world. But, one day, the two-leggeds took over dominion, and they became kings. They brought us into their lairs, put us on chains, and gave us fresh meat as offering for their reverence. In time, we became lazy and started to shrink, no longer wielding the power we once had. We became complacent, accepting the ease that the humans provided. If they want to worship and feed us so be it. But never has instinct, our very nature, been forgotten...

By this time a crowd had gathered, all intently listening to the old cat. They were mesmerized by the images the old pillar-cat drew. B2 was quiet. He didn't know what to think about the things he'd heard.

"How do you know this stuff? Where do these tall tales come from?" B2 asked, "I can't believe we were once as you say. You're just an old pillar-sitter, lazing in the sun all day."

"Someday you will know little one, now run along, go chase and tackle your friends as if they were a great herd of antelope running across the grassland," and with that Minnie started cleaning himself to get comfortable for the day.

B2 was uncharacteristically thoughtful as he stalked and pounced on his friends throughout the day. He looked warily upon the non-descript bowl of food the "human" set out for them. That night, he dreamt. He was huge, as big as the wolfhound next door. He was crouched low in the tall grass of a vast valley, eyeing a large herd of zebra, watching their every move. He spotted the weak one and circled around... And then B2 woke, empowered, yet disturbed by the vividness of his dream.

The next morning, and many mornings after, B2 went to listen to Minnie tell his tales. Sometimes the stories would be of his cousins, both near and far, the jaguars, bobcats, lions, tigers, and cheetahs. Sometimes they would be about the dangers of living in the human world, cars, vets, and mysterious disappearances. Sometimes the stories just meandered around everyday cat's life. Minnie told him of catnip, dust baths, and offspring. Then the old mystic would send B2 off to play because that was as important to a kitten's education as listening to an old cat tell stories. But he would always quietly add, "Someday you will remember."

As the days went by and B2 grew, he found he was way too busy to sit at the foot of the pillar all morning. He became much more interested in chasing after the sweet scent of some of his former wrestling mates. He soon forgot about the old storyteller. Occasionally, he would stop and chat about the weather, or a misfortune of some kind. Later he would send his offspring to go listen to the old pillar-cat tell tall tales.

And then one day B2 noticed that the pillar was empty; the old cat was nowhere to be seen. So he thought he would jump up, just to look around, and a strange feeling came over him, sort of like an itch. He started to clean himself and get ready for the day. Sitting atop a pillar, at the edge of the yard, B2 sunned himself and looked out upon the world. Soon, the young kittens would gather around the yard to listen to the old cat tell tales...